DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 166 750 CS 502 399

AUTHOR Dubois, Betty Lou
TITLE Communication for the Minority Person With or Without English as a Second Language.
PUB DATE Nov 78
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (64th, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 2-5, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Basic Skills; *Communication Skills; *Educational Principles; *English (Second Language); Higher Education; *Minority Groups; *Nonstandard Dialects; *Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

A functioning communication skills course for minority students has developed five pedagogical principles and appropriate techniques for teaching such students effectively: treat the minority student as an individual, not as a representative of some preconceived group; pay attention to the content, not the dialectal form, of a student's messages; exercise pedagogical ingenuity to structure teaching so that language acquisition can take place; provide alternative routes to reach a given goal to avoid possible violation of sociolinguistic and learning patterns of minorities; and provide tasks that are perceived as valid. Although the students in this particular course are gifted, the principles apply to other circumstances, to larger classes of less remarkable students. (TJ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED166750

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

COMMUNICATION FOR THE MINORITY PERSON WITH OR WITHOUT ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Betty Lou Dubois
New Mexico State University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Betty Lou Dubois

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

C 5502399

COMMUNICATION FOR THE MINORITY PERSON WITH OR WITHOUT ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Betty Lou Dubois

Among the new kinds of students, nontraditional students, as they are called, who are appearing in increasing numbers on our campuses are members of racial and ethnic minorities.[1] In tailoring educational programs for them, language and communication professionals must first ask what their needs are. That obvious question has an obvious answer: minority students need to be able to speak well in public as in private, to solve problems in small groups, to read aloud effectively. In short, minority students need the communication skills that the "others" need. So, why not put them into the courses already set up and just not prevent them from learning? In other words, if minority students' needs are the same as others', they ought to profit from the instructional systems that benefit others. Unfortunately, for the moment at least, they do not do so across the board. To see why, and what to do about it, let us look at some important factors which teachers often overlook, to arrive at five pedagogical principles. The principles will be illustrated with strategies from a functioning communication skills course for minority students.

In an effort to remedy underrepresentation of minority persons in biomedical research, the national Minority Access to Research Careers Program, the MARC program, was established by the National Institutes of Health. The purpose of MARC is to identify gifted minority students at the undergraduate level and to enrich their education to assure them

success in securing advanced degrees in the biomedical sciences. For the MARC program at New Mexico State University,[2] one of fifteen funded in 1977-78, I designed a component unique to our program, a course in communications skills for the biomedical sciences. The main goals of the course, which is to be offered each spring semester for the duration of the training grant, are to teach the students to write papers for scientific journals and present them at national meetings and to write articles and make presentations on scientific topics for lay audiences. Bearing the MARC program course and its goals in mind, let us now derive five major pedagogical principles for minortity education.

1. While it may be useful for some purposes to speak of " the minority student," educators must never forget that the label is only a convenient fiction, for there are at least three kinds of variation among minorities. First, there are intergroup differences. Current talk about cultural differences is not mere lip service for the sake of outward appearance, but a genuine realization that they do in fact exist. Amerindians are culturally different from Blacks, who are different from Vietnamese, and so on.

Although the idea is not nearly so well accepted, there is enormous intragroup variation--our second type--as well. Among Amerindians, for example, we find tribes who until recently were nomadic, following crops or game, as well as groups who have lived in the same settlements for hundreds of years; in fact, the oldest continuously occupied towns in the United States are not New England villages, but pueblos of the middle Rio Grande River Valley. Among the pueblos themselves, we find

quite different languages and customs, such that we cannot presume to understand them all by understanding one. We tend similarly to group students according to language, but the fact is that Chinese from Taiwan and those from, say, Indonesia, are culturally distinct; Chicanos, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans, although all Spanish speaking, have had radically different social and cultural histories.

In addition to between-group variation and within-group variation, we find a third kind, the individual. In the Spanish surnamed group of Mexican origin, we find people who are monolingual in English, as well as some who speak no English at all. We find that families whose forbears resided in New Mexico two hundred years ago are today living side by side with some who have just arrived from Mexico. The practical consequence of individual variation is that we can find members of minority groups whose communicative behavior is radically different from that of their majority peers; but we can also find some whose behavior in the university setting is virtually indistinguishable from that of equivalent Anglos.[3] Minority students, then, can be as skilled, or as unskilled, as their nonminority fellows, but in the case of lack of skills, we may see the minority students in a different perspective. Often, an ordinary lack of skills is especially noted in a minority student. For example, at American universities, far too many students use a variety of English commonly called "collegese"--a lot of big words only dimly understood. We are so accustomed to it from majority students that it passes as usual, but in the mouths of minority students, it is treated as some strange new kind of "language problem." In our sincere efforts to help

minorities, we overact.

PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLE #1. Treat the minority student as an individual, not as a representative of some preconceived group. Determine his strengths and weaknesses, and go from there.

Application--With respect to the students of the MARC program, the following kinds of information were gathered in order to look separately at each person: results from reading and vocabulary tests, speech and hearing evaluations, anecdotal evidence from each student's preceptor as well as from the program director, videotaped samples of formal speaking and previously written lab reports. Goals for the course were laid down when the proposal was submitted, but teaching sequences were planned for each student on the basis of the current state of his skills.

2. With respect to language, a minority student who is different from mainstream students may fall into either of two categories. First, he may be a lifelong fluent English monolingual, but a speaker of non-standard variety, social, ethnic, or regional, of English. In such a case, he obviously won't command network standard English, he may lack the vocabulary the teacher would like him to have, he may lack a full range of styles, in which, incidentally, he does not differ greatly from many Anglos. The teacher must attend to what he says--to his message--rather than to how he says it--to the form of the message. One doesn't have to be a speaker of "general American" to be an effective, even an eloquent speaker. If that were the case, most everybody in the British Isles, Australia, and Canada would need remedial instruction. Finally,

we must not underestimate the role of ethnic and social dialect in the definition of identity, both personal and social. A corrective foray against a student's variety of English is likely to be perceived as an attack on the student himself.

PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLE #2. Pay attention to the content, not the dialectal form, of a student's messages.

Application--The first 1977-78 MARC students, four Chicanos and one Amerindian, were all fully fluent in English. Two of the students were indistinguishable from Anglos, while three of them retained varying degrees of ethnicity in their English, chiefly phonological features. At the point at which the question of ethnic varieties of English arose, the class discussed fully and openly the function of ethnic variety in personal and social identification, its positive aspect and then its possible evocation of negative reactions in some hearers. Understanding both positive and negative values of ethnic varieties of English, the three students were free to choose to keep their English as it was or to get assistance in "standardizing" it. None chose to change.

3. Pedagogical Principle #2 dealt with a minority student fully fluent in an ethnic variety of English. Other minority students may be less than fully fluent, i.e., they maybe English learners. Here, the situation is admittedly more difficult, but certainly not hopeless. After all, language acquisition in real-life communicative situations is a natural process, one for which homo sapiens is uniquely and perfectly endowed. Teachers must therefore not be intimidated by the presence of English learners in their classrooms. They can learn to paraphrase, to

define words and terms, to supplement with extra remarks, examples, readings, videotaped demonstration. They can organize small groups so that the English learner can profit from peer teaching.

PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLE #3. Exercise your pedagogical ingenuity to structure your teaching so that language acquisition can take place.

Application--Because the 1977-78 MARC students were all fully fluent in English, principle #3 was not applicable.

4. Now, besides purely linguistic differences among students, we also encounter sociolinguistics ones: variety in the way language is used in social groups, actual differences in rules for speaking. For example, in the traditional Mescalero Apache band, leadership is maintained chiefly through the ability to persuade. When the band leader can no longer convince his followers of the wisdom of his policies, they simply choose another leader or even join another band.[4] Students acculturated in that pattern are not accustomed to taking the teacher's word for things just because the teacher is standing at the front of the room. Other sociolinguistic differences can show up in the tabuing of a topic in one social group, though not in another; rules for conversational turn takings vary from group to group. Silence on the part of a minority student may not indicate linguistic inability so much as inappropriateness of topic or occasion. And, although there is no space to discuss it thoroughly here, we must be aware that many groups have other learning styles than the classic American university model. On the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in Oregon, for instance, there is less direct teaching

than observation of skilled performance, to be followed by a period of practice out of sight and hearing of observers. Only when a learner feels himself ready to perform without error does he demonstrate his skill to others.[5]

PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLE #4. Provide alternative routes to reach a given goal to avoid possible violation of socio-linguistic and learning patterns of minorities.

Application--After making course goals clear, I allowed the MARC student maximum flexibility in demonstrating that they had reached them. In the matter of turn taking for speeches, students themselves chose their order of presentation, so that those who needed more observation time were given it. I made clear my availability for individual help and left it to the students to seek when they determined to.

5. Finally, as for all students, also with minority students and especially at the beginning of a course, assignments and goals should have a high degree of face validity. They should appeal to students as useful in their student days as well as in their chosen careers after graduation. Although most of us already know we should not spend a great deal of time teaching our students how to accept Nobel prizes, we may still be requiring things that strike students as only slightly less ridiculous.

PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLE #5. Provide tasks that are perceived as valid; make goals clear and explicit.

Application--In the MARC biomedical communications skills course, we began with the professional papers, both written and spoken, because all

the students were scheduled to appear at national meetings within the year and were participating in research efforts which looked likely to produce publishable papers. Not being a biomedical scientist myself, I had my own problems of face validity and therefore did not ask students merely to take my word about how papers should be written or fifteen minute oral presentations made. Instead, we analyzed published articles in the students' specialties and, for the speeches, tape recordings which I had made at the December 1977 joint meeting of the Royal Canadian and American Zoological Societies. The "lay" papers were undertaken second, for it was much less obvious to the students that they were necessary and also because by the second half of the semester, students were willing to accept my dicta on speaking and writing.

In conclusion, I realize that I was extremely fortunate in being able to implement my pedagogical principles for the teaching of minority students in particularly favored circumstances: in a small class of gifted students. Nevertheless, the principles are applicable to other circumstances, to larger classes of less remarkable, though not less worthy, students with equally good results.

Notes

[1]The paper is an expanded version of a presentation made for the panel "Communication and Lifelong Learning: The Nontraditional Student," 64th Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Minneapolis, November 2-5, 1978.

[2]Grant #5T32 #GM07667-02

[3]Betty Lou Dubois, "A CLOZE study of Verb Usage in Context: Anglos and Chicanos," in The Fourth LACUS Forum 1977, ed. Michel Paradis (Columbia, S.C.: Hornbeam, 1978), pp. 604-15.

[4]Harry Basehart, "Mescalero Apache Political and Organization," in Apachean Culture History and Ethnology, ed. Keith H. Basso and Morris E. Opler (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1971).

[5]Susan U. Philips, "Participant Structures and Communicative Competence: Warm Springs Children in Community and Classroom," in Functions of Language in the Classroom, ed. Courtney Cazden, et al. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1972) pp. 370-394.